



February 3, 2010

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Dear Honorable Members of the Families and Children's Services Committee:

The American Adoption Congress, founded in 1978, is a national organization committed to adoption education and reform. We promote public policies that encourage humane, honest adoption practices that are sustained by data and research. The right of adopted adults to their original birth certificate is a cause that we support.

It is time for Michigan to be progressive regarding access since the state is increasingly being criticized for lagging behind in this issue. Research and best practices today concludes that:

- Prohibiting adopted people from getting their personal information raises significant human rights concerns and potentially serious, negative consequences for their physical and mental health.
- In states that now allow access, there has been no evidence that the legal changes have caused problematic behavior by adopted persons or damage to birthmother's lives.

No promise of anonymity to birthmothers exists in any state's relinquishment or legal paperwork, including Michigan's. If birthmothers were truly guaranteed anonymity, a legal protection would have been ensured through documentation presented to her at the relinquishment that required her signature. Birth mothers have the same protections under the law as all other citizens including the right of privacy. Privacy does not equal secrecy.

In Tennessee, Delaware, Oregon, Alabama, New Hampshire and Maine laws have been changed to allow access by adopted adults to their previously sealed original birth certificates. Since the new law took effect in New Hampshire over 1200 birth certificates have been requested with no harm reported. Since the law changed in Oregon, over 10,000 adopted adults have received their birth certificates, again with no ill effects. The story is the same in Kansas and Alaska where original birth certificates have always been available. In all states that have enacted access, no family disruptions, declines in adoptions or other adverse effects have been reported.

House Bills 4006 and HB 4015 will restore the privilege of adopted adults to access their identifying information, thus granting them rights equal to those enjoyed by all other citizens of Michigan. I urge your support of this legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Martin Mason
Legislative Committee Chair
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